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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004510

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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS MINISTER ON PRISON INSPECTIONS,
ACCOUNTABILITY, AND DEPUTY MINISTER SLOT

Classified By: POLCOUNS MARGARET SCOBAY FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Minister of Human Rights Wijdan complained to Human Rights Officer December 6 that the Ministry of Interior had begun preventing her inspection teams from accessing MoI detention facilities, having turned her teams away during the last three inspection attempts. She admitted that rarely if ever did she see follow up action on any of the human rights abuses that her ministry reported to the Prime Minister's Office, calling into question how effective her internal reports truly were. In other news, Minister stated that the introductory meeting for the joint GoI/US detention inspections had gone well, and that she was continuing to receive pressure from SCIRI and Sunni parties to nominate a Deputy Minister of their political party affiliation. End Summary.

MOI BLOCKS INSPECTIONS

¶2. (C) In a meeting December 6, Minister Wijdan noted to PolOff that the Ministry of Interior had begun to block access to Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) inspection teams. The last three attempts by the Ministry's prison inspection personnel to access MOI's facilities had been denied. She indicated that in the next week she would raise this issue with the MoI minister and/or the Prime Minister's office. She affirmed that these inspections had proven to be extremely useful in the past, not only in checking abuse, but also in collecting inmate names held at MOD, MoI, MoJ, and Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) facilities. One of the not-so publicized services that MoHR provides is helping families find missing relatives, some of whom are incarcerated. Since little exists in the way of a central detainee name repository, the MoHR often serves as a family's best resources in quickly locating their relative.

¶3. (C) MoI's Inspector General Akeel al-Taraihi told Human Rights officer December 10 that the decision to turn away these teams had come directly from the Minister's office by written order, noting that controls on who could visit the facility had to be strict given the precarious security and political environment. (However, in a separate conversation, Major Haider from the Minister's office denied that this was the case). When pushed, Al-Taraihi claimed that these teams would be given access to the facilities, particularly if they gave MOI advance notice of their visits. Human Rights officer emphasized the importance of allowing MoHR inspection teams into MoI facilities and allowing them to conduct short notice surprise visits. Al-Taraihi was firm that any such decision would have to come from the Minister of Interior or Prime Minister's Office.

MINISTER ADMITS TO SLIM RESULTS

14. (C) Minister Wijdan admitted that none of the complaints that her ministry had forwarded to the Prime Minister's office had ever received attention or resolution. In most cases, she indicated that she was able to work with the Ministry in question, particularly their IG human rights sections, to resolve various complaints. In cases where the issue was still not resolved, she forwarded notifications directly to the Prime Minister. The Minister was unsure who in the PM's office was responsible for Human Rights, but agreed that she needed to interact with the office more to push for a response on the more serious cases.

JOINT DETENTION FACILITY INSPECTION INTRO

15. (C) The Ministry of Human Rights held its kickoff meeting to restart the joint GoI/US detention facility inspections. Minister Wijdan said it went well, though several key members did not attend, for example there was no representative from the higher juridical council. The Minister admitted that the meeting was purely an introduction and did not result in an action plan for inspections, something that she hoped would occur during the next meeting mid-December.

SUNNI/SHIA ASPIRATIONS FOR DEPUTY POSITION

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16. (C) Minister Wijdan reported that both Shia and Sunni political parties were continuing to place pressure on her to nominate one of their party members for the unfilled position of Deputy Minister. She was approached by Abdul Azziz-al Hakim on three separate occasions who asked her to nominate a candidate from SCIRI. The Minister indicated that she was fearful of nominating a candidate from SCIRI given the party's reputation for human rights abuses. "If I have a Deputy Minister from SCIRI, they will bring their militia members into the ministry as employees and I am afraid of what they will do and how they will use the information that we keep". On the other hand, she said, she was not impressed with the candidates that Sunni parties such as the National Dialogue Council or the Iraqi's People Conference had put forth, many of whom had little if any work experience. She said that she would continue to delay action on any nomination.

COMMENT

17. (C) Ministry of Human Rights abuse reports rarely, if ever, result in true accountability such as criminal proceedings against wrongdoers. The Ministry is also often unable to access detention facilities located in the toughest parts of Baghdad or Iraq, preventing it from ever reporting on those facilities. Regardless of these limitations, its "watchdog" presence still is important in deterring some forms of abuse that an embedded IG might otherwise feel pressure to ignore. Failure to access MoI facilities throws a wrench in this role, though the newly authorized joint detention facility inspections would allow MoHR to be involved to a degree. Post will follow up with Minister Wijdan on the results of her conversation with the Minister of Interior.

KHALILZAD